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Re: HB-4024/4026

Mr. Chair, committee members,

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. I am here on behalf of the Department to urge that you not discharge these two bills.

The real question that needs to be answered is NOT whether businesses can use E-verify, or whether local governments can mandate it's use, or even whether the State can add it as a contract requirement – it is whether the legislature should tell business owners how to run their businesses – whether it should tell local governments how to run their counties/cities/townships.

The question is where Michigan's real priorities are: Are we serious about wanting to be business friendly and welcoming to all? Or are we so determined to prove that we are more anti-immigrant than the next state that we will pass business regulations and limit local government rule?

The question is whether we going to allow our justified anger over 9-11 and our unjustified fear of anything, or anyone, foreign – to drive us to yank the welcome mat out from investors, business start ups, and people who hold the advanced degrees that businesses are finding so difficult to find?

On the reference to 9-11, I remind the committee that it was the bill's sponsor that sited it, and terrorism, as reasons to pass these bills – though to my recollection all 9-11 and other terrorists striking in the U.S. have had required documents. It has also been suggested by these bills sponsors that forcing employment agencies to run e-verify will provide safety protection to the companies getting the employees. Given that Americas experience with terrorists would suggest that they are likely to have legal documentation (or at least the ability to fraudulently appear as though they do) these bills at best promote a false sense of security.

WHEN SOMEONE IS THINKING OF STARTING A BUSINESS IN – OR OF MOVING TO – MICHIGAN, THEY DO NOT ONLY ASK WHETHER IT IS A GOOD PLACE TO WORK, BUT ALSO WHEHTER IT IS A GOOD PLACE TO GO HOME AFTER WORK.

The Governor has recognized that Michigan can reap great benefits if we put out the welcome mat for foreign born investors, business startups and skilled workers. MICHIGAN WILL HOWEVER LOSE THIS OPPORTUNITY FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH IF WE HOLD THAT WELCOME MAT OUT WITH ONE HAND, AND BUT HOLD A KEEP OUT SIGN IN THE OTHER.

Whether it is your motivation or not, whether this legislation would actually hurt people born in other countries (or who just “look” like they were) – the reality is that because it is unnecessary, and because immigration is a federal concern and e-verify should be equally enforced in all states if it is as valuable as claimed, it will be seen as message that Michigan is less friendly to persons who are foreign born than are those states who don’t go out of their way to pass such laws.

HB-4024/4026 are unnecessary, they will do little if anything to address the justifications offered for them, and they are likely to work against the economic interests of the State. They should not be passed.